

Genesis 45:3-15

Epiphany 7; February 24 & 25, 2019

On July 19, 1989, United Flight 232 left Denver heading to Chicago. The flight took off without any incident. 298 passengers were nestled into their seats on the DC-10. The plane leveled off at 37,000 feet. The flight attendants were already servicing the passengers, most of whom were reading, working, napping. From all appearances, everything looked normal, predictable, and stable. But at exactly 1 hour and 7 minutes after take-off, the number-two engine, mounted high on the tail, suddenly blew apart.

The flight panel immediately showed that the engine had failed, the plane's hydraulic system had ceased to function. That normally would concern the captain, but not alarm him, because every DC-10 was equipped with three independent hydraulic systems so that a failure of one or two would not disable the plane. However, there existed only one small vulnerable spot to these three independent hydraulic systems, a four-foot square space located toward the tail section where all three hydraulic systems converge. The odds of anything going wrong in that small target area had been calculated at a billion to one. It had simply never happened.

After the heroic efforts of the flight crew, the plane turned toward a small airport in Sioux City, Iowa. As the plane touched down, the right wing touched the ground first, which sent the plane cart wheeling over the ground and bursting into flames. But when it was all over, 187 lives were saved; 111 people died. The investigation would later discover that the cause of the engine failing was a microscopic flaw in one of the fan blades that happened when the blade was manufactured years before the crash. After more than 15,000 cycles of take offs and landings, that tiny microscopic flaw caused the engine to fail and the plane failed that day.

In many ways, the story of Joseph is really a story about a flaw that is found in every one of us. It is a flaw that we are born with. It is a flaw that is far more serious than a flaw with an engine blade. This flaw, if not corrected, will cause each of us to fail before our God. It is the flaw of sin. No matter who you are, we all are infected with this same flaw. The story of Joseph is an account about how only God can fix that flaw of sin through forgiveness. It is not really a story about how a man went from rags to riches. It's not a lesson on how to be successful in life. It's not a lesson about what great things God can do for you. It simply is a lesson on forgiveness. It answers the question: *How can we forgive like Joseph? How can we forgive like God?*

Joseph's family was so unbelievable that, if it was made into a soap opera, no one would believe it. It almost sounds like something Jerry Springer would want on his show. This was a family that was full of the flaws of sin. Every person involved in this story is tainted with sin. In the book of Genesis, there are eight main characters who illustrate how faith functions in our relationship with God. Perhaps, the most important account is of Abraham, who rises as the Pike's Peak of faith in the Old Testament. But the story of Joseph is the longest of each of these people. As you look at that, you can't help but ask the question: *"Why?"* What's so important about the story of Joseph? Why does God cause Moses to write so much about this account of Joseph? What doesn't God want us to miss?

As I said, Joseph's family history is a mess. We don't have enough time to talk about all the details. Suffice it to say that Joseph had a mother, three stepmothers, ten step-brothers, one brother, and a step sister--all living in the home at the same time. Over the years, his father, Jacob, though generally a godly man, embraced the polygamy that was common in the day, which opened the door to jealousy, insecurity and almost constant conflict among his wives. Jacob was also a passive parent, whose lack of involvement and leadership brought incredible pain and confusion to his family. In the middle of this, Jacob loved Joseph more than his other brothers. He wasn't afraid to show it. That caused feelings of jealousy among his brothers, which led to hate. Some of the brothers wanted to kill Joseph, but finally they decided to get rid of Joseph by selling him to slave traders, who agreed to take Joseph away from them.

As you read this account of Joseph, you can't help but think: *If ever someone had a reason for revenge, to hold onto a grudge, to refuse forgiveness - Joseph certainly would have been that person... don't you think?* Here is a 17 year old kid who is tossed away by his brothers. When Joseph was taken away, I'm not really sure he could see how any good could come out of this. Even though God would bless him over the next number of years, he would find himself in prison, accused of assault, forgotten in prison. Through all of this, God was slowly teaching Joseph to trust in Him. So, over the

next 24 years God would teach Joseph to take the spotlight off of himself, and have it shine on God alone. That's the lesson of forgiveness that God wishes to teach us in our text.

Our text picks up the story 24 years after Joseph is sold to be a slave. Through a number of series of events, Joseph would eventually find himself being the 2nd in command of the superpower of Egypt. For seven years, Egypt would experience bumper crops. Joseph was in charge of stockpiling grain because there were seven years of famine coming. When that famine began to hit the whole area, Jacob's household ran out of food. The only place that had grain in that entire area was Egypt. So, Jacob's sons made the 300 plus mile trip to Egypt.

When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food, they run into Joseph. Joseph recognized them, but they did not recognize Joseph. Countless other details happened over these chapters in Genesis in regards to Joseph and his brothers. After grain ran out from the first trip the brothers have to return to Egypt for more grain. The events in our text happen after they make the second trip to Egypt. One of the brothers had been in prison in Egypt between those two trips waiting for the brothers' return with their youngest brother, Benjamin.

The day had finally come for Joseph to reveal who he was to them. **"I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."** Could you have imagined how terrified they felt? All of the guilt that they had been trying to bury for 24 years suddenly came up front and center. Yet, look at what Joseph said? **"God sent me ahead of you!"** *"This isn't your fault. You are forgiven because God has forgiven you. It's not my place to judge you. God brought me here as part of his plan to save many lives, including you."*

If it wasn't clear enough in these words, Joseph later would tell his brothers after Jacob's death when they were once again afraid that Joseph might now let them have it for what they did. He says to them: **"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."** Did you catch it? Jacob remembered all the brothers had done to him. He remembered the hurt. He had not forgotten. Even though he did remember, he wanted them to know that it didn't matter. God had forgiven them. He had forgiven them.

Joseph wanted his brothers to know that you and I don't get to be the ones who decide who gets forgiveness or not. On a regular basis, we pray the words: *"forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."* Do we always do that? Or do we find ourselves thinking as we pray those words: *"but God you really don't understand what that other person has done to me?"*

Satan wants us to think that we are in the place of God. He wants us to think that WE get to decide who to forgive or not. But that's not what the Bible tells us. Again and again, God tells us to forgive as he has forgiven us. God knows exactly how it feels to have someone hurt us because that is what we do to him. We don't always respect God. We don't always love him. We don't always obey him. Yet, what does he do? God chooses to forgive. He chooses to ALWAYS forgive us, even though we don't deserve it.

Is this easy to do? No. But this is what God does. Day after day in all the little ordinary things of this life, he forgives. Sometimes, we look at this story of Joseph and think of the big story. It is easier to see God in the big things in life. But God wants us to see him in the little things in life. Day after day when we think that God doesn't remember us, he does. Day after day, he forgives us again and again. There are no strings attached to his forgiveness. That's what Joseph wanted his brothers to know. Forgiveness is taken entirely out of our hands and placed into the hands of the person who had nails pounded through those hands. Our sins and, the sins of those against us, are placed into the hands of the Savior whose scars tell the story of unconditional love.

Every one of us sitting here today have flaws. I have them. You have them. Joseph had them. His brothers had them. Everyone in the story of Joseph had them. The message of the story of Joseph is simple – we have a God who fixes our greatest flaw; the flaw of sin. That's the beautiful truth of forgiveness. May God help each one of us to forgive as he has forgiven us. Amen.